COMMONWEALTH *Of* LEARNING

Guide to Gender-Responsive Learning Materials Development

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Introduction

This guide is designed to be used as a tool to enhance gender equality considerations in learning materials. Women and girls constitute half of the world's population,[1] and granting them the same opportunities offered to men and boys in their learning journey has proven to be not only beneficial to women and girls, but also critical to national development. Understanding the different learning needs of women/girls and men/boys is therefore key to help women/girls reach their full potential, an increasingly important factor in social progress.

This document defines and explains the need for "gender-responsive learning materials"; describes the purpose of this tool and its target audience; and provides instructions on how to use it.

All terms in italics are defined in the Glossary of Gender Terms at the end of the guide.

What are gender-responsive learning materials?

- Learning materials qualify as gender-responsive when they are designed, developed and implemented with careful and intentional consideration of the different learning needs of women/girls and men/boys so that all these learners are equally involved in the creation of and participation in learning opportunities, and in the decision-making processes that affect such opportunities.

Why do learning materials need to be gender-responsive?

- When developing and reviewing learning materials, it is useful to keep in mind that target learners all have different learning needs, interests and capacities. If the material does not take these differences into account, it will risk reaching one group at the expense of another. The group that is currently left out, or whose needs are inadequately met, in curricula tends to be women and girls.

- Learning materials that are not gender-responsive often use *gender-blind* and *gender-neutral* language and/or approaches, thus perpetuating stereotypes and existing inequalities between women and men. *Gender-blindness* shows a lack of understanding that women's/girls' and men's/boys' roles and responsibilities are determined by their specific social, cultural, economic and political contexts and backgrounds.[2] Overlooking the influence of these different roles and diverse needs in learning initiatives results in a missed opportunity to challenge the existing unequal structure of gender relations. A *gender-neutral* concept or language is often used to convey that a certain process or policy does not affect women or men differently. Gender-neutral terms such as "chairperson," "salesperson," "flight attendant" or "police officer" are useful and appropriate gender-neutral alternative terminologies, but care must be taken that

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1 The World Bank. Data (2017), Population, female (% of total). Retrieved from https://data.worldbank.org/indicator/SP.POP.TOTL.FE.ZS

2 Gender blindness. In UNICEF, UNFPA, UNDP and UN Women (n.d.), "Gender equality, UN coherence and you." *Glossary*. Retrieved from https://www.unicef.org/gender/training/content/resources/Glossary.pdf

gender neutrality does not perpetuate systemic or internalised *gender bias* and risk gender-blindness. One way to avoid conveying gender-blind messages via gender-neutral language is to integrate feminine pronouns in occupations traditionally dominated by men and vice versa. For example:

» *The <u>fire fighter</u> came out of the burning building, holding an elderly man in <u>her</u> arms.*

» *The <u>nurse</u> took care of all <u>his</u> patients this morning and welcomed their visitors as well.*

The inadvertent impact of using a non-gender-responsive approach is that it can often send the wrong message to women (and also some men), suggesting their contributions to society are insignificant or even invisible, and that their learning needs and interests are not as important as men's. Consequently, they might feel discouraged from participating in learning activities, which only worsens the overall *gender gap* in education. That in turn has serious implications for the earning potential of women (and some men). In households headed by a woman, the inability of mothers to enrol in secondary, tertiary or non-formal education can have a devastating effect. That said, men might also find themselves excluded from certain occupations perceived to be women's domains, such as secretarial and nursing positions. That is why it is

critical that learning materials portray a more balanced representation of women and men in non-traditional occupations.[3]

• The reasons women and men have different learning needs and experiences are based on historical *gender gaps* that include, for example, *reproductive roles of women and men,* low literacy rates among women/girls, *occupational gender segregation, women's lower status in society, gender-based violence, gender discrimination* and *unequal access to resources* such as knowledge, Internet and computers, to name only a few. Women/girls and men/boys do not have equal access to education in many parts of the world because of societal and cultural beliefs and norms that assign specific roles to each gender.

• Eliminating the *gender gap* in learning initiatives is crucial for ensuring women/girls and men/boys achieve their full potential. When women and girls are educated, the impact is felt across generations, as they can make informed decisions that will affect not only their own lives, health and futures, but also those of their children and families.

• Note that in the Caribbean region, it is boys and men who have been underachieving in secondary and tertiary education.[4] This underlines that learning materials should strive to achieve a balanced and inclusive approach that reflects the learning needs, challenges and capacities of both women and men.

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3 Non-traditional occupations refer to professions that were historically restricted to either men or women. Examples of non-traditional occupations for women: engineer, senior manager, welder; for men: elementary school teacher, secretary, nurse.

4 World Economic Forum (17 September 2015), *This is what the world's education gender gap looks like.* Retrieved from https://www.weforum.org/agenda/2015/09/education-gender-gap-around-the-world

Purpose of This Guide

This document offers guidance for better integration of gender equality issues into learning materials during the preparation and development process:

- It aims to provide up-to-date information and tips on how to develop gender-responsive learning materials.

- It is not exhaustive but offers points of reference in the form of questions in all the key areas of learning material development.

- Users are encouraged to read it through and identify the questions that are most relevant to their curriculum.

- The proposed questions in each section of the guide are intended to help users explore the notion of gender equality in the written curriculum and in its delivery and evaluation. Although the questions build on one another, they are not sequential.

Target Audience

The primary audience for this tool is course writers and revisers who prepare and develop curricula as well as educators (teachers, tutors, mentors) responsible for the delivery and evaluation of courses. By using this tool consistently, writers, content developers, revisers, editors, illustrators and educators will be better equipped to incorporate gender-responsiveness into the various components of course development, revision, delivery, assessment and evaluation.

Guide to Gender-Responsive Learning Materials Development

PART A: WRITTEN CURRICULUM

A1. Design

1. Does the curriculum acknowledge and mention any gender issues that may relate to the course subject matter?

2. To what extent do the course description, objectives and learning outcomes promote *gender equality*?

3. Are gender considerations raised at appropriate points throughout the unit?

4. Were women's and men's different accessibility levels factored in when choosing the learning media?

5. Would it be helpful to include a glossary of gender terms relating to the subject matter?

6. Does the course consider the different learning needs of female and male learners in both urban and rural settings?

7. How does the course factor in the different learning needs of female and male learners from different groups (e.g. socio-economic, or other) and who have varying access to resources?

A2. Content

1. Do the content and exercises integrate gender concepts and a *gender perspective*?

2. Does the content reflect an inclusive and participatory approach?

3. Does the content promote equal participation of women and men?

4. Do the stories, case studies and examples include women/girls and men/boys as active participants in roughly equal numbers?

5. Are women presented as having equal value to men? For example, do learning materials present role models, leaders and historical figures in a way that fairly represents gender and race/ethnic backgrounds?

6. Are the statistics or figures provided in the course material *disaggregated by sex*?

A3. Learning Activities

1. Do learning activities raise awareness of gender issues related to the subject matter?

2. Do learning activities help develop learners' competencies in gender issues (knowledge and skills) in the subject matter?

A4. Representation, Language, Images and Learning Resources

1. Is there *gender balance* among content developers, editors, revisers and illustrators?

2. Is there equal and positive representation of females and males in images as authors/ narrators and protagonists?

3. Is gender-responsive language used?

4. Do learning resources (including charts, visuals, text, examples, case studies, topic titles) avoid demonstrating *gender bias* or using *gender stereotypes*?

5. Do reference materials include the perspectives of female and male scholars, researchers and others?

PART B: DELIVERY AND EVALUATION

B1. Delivery

1. Is the course/learning programme delivered in a way that reaches female and male learners equally?

2. What types of measures are taken to address any difference in access, interests, needs and capacities of female and male learners?

3. Is the mode of delivery flexible or adaptable so that it can equally reach female and male learners, particularly those who might be prevented from participating due to work or household responsibilities?

B2. Assessment

1. Where appropriate, are feedback and solutions being provided equally for both female and male learners in order to help them learn what they need to know?

2. Do assessment tools offer a variety of ways to assess and evaluate learner progress so there is equality of opportunity and outcome?

3. Do the assessment tools provide some degree of flexibility in terms of timing and duration to accommodate *gender roles* and allow sufficient time for completion of course work?

B3. Learner Support Services

1. Are the supports and additional resources being provided to female and male learners adequate to facilitate student retention and success?

2. Is there *gender balance* among mentors and tutors?

3. Do instructors and learner support staff understand *gender bias* and how this can affect how and to what extent learning takes place as well as how learners are assessed?

4. Are instructors and learner support staff provided with any training, tips and/or guidance regarding the different needs and experiences of female and male learners and other gender issues that affect learning outcomes?

B4. Evaluation

1. Are learning outcomes monitored and measured by gender, and are there any differences in outcomes associated with gender?

2. Does the course meet the different learning needs of both female and male learners and enhance livelihood options?

3. Is *quantitative baseline sex-disaggregated* data being gathered to enable monitoring of the number of female and male learners?

4. Is *qualitative gender-sensitive data* being collected to monitor female and male learner progress in terms of needs, enrolment, completion and outcomes?

Glossary Of Gender Terms

Disaggregated by sex: See *Quantitative sex-disaggregated data*.

Gender is an overarching and fundamental variable that intersects with all other cross-cutting variables such as race, class, age, ethnicity, sexual orientation, religion, disability and locality. Gender systems are rooted in different socio-economic contexts that determine what is expected, allowed and valued in a woman/man and girl/boy in these specific contexts. Gender roles are learned through socialisation processes; they are not fixed but changeable. Perspectives on gender are institutionalised through educational, political and economic systems; legislation; and culture, religion and traditions.[5]

Gender balance is a "human resource issue as it concerns the equal participation of women and men in all areas of work"[6] including in projects and training events.

Gender-based violence (GBV) is "an umbrella term for any harmful act that is perpetrated against a person's will and that is based on socially ascribed (gender) differences between women/girls and men/boys. The nature and extent of specific types of GBV vary across cultures, countries and regions. Examples include sexual violence, domestic violence, forced/early marriage, female genital mutilation, honour killings and widow inheritance."[7] The general social acceptance of domestic violence across the world undermines women's and girls' ability to live without fear. When someone's basic rights to safety and security are violated, it is difficult for them to pursue their interests, such as education and work, because they are primarily preoccupied with surviving the physical and sexual violence they might be experiencing.

Gender bias refers to the "unfair difference in the way women and men are treated"[8] and also perceived based on their gender.

Gender blindness is the failure to recognise that women and men have specific roles and responsibilities assigned by "social, cultural, economic, and political contexts" and expectations.[9] Gender-blind curricula reinforce gender inequalities and do not try to change the unequal structure of gender relations, and gender-blind terms used generically, such as "mankind," "chairman," "man" and "men," reinforce gender stereotypes. Gender blindness also includes the failure to use female role models in modules and case studies. Failing to recognise the differences between genders means those differences will not be accommodated.

Gender discrimination is defined as "any distinction, exclusion or restriction made on the basis of sex which has the effect or purpose of impairing or nullifying the recognition, enjoyment or exercise by women, irrespective of their marital status, on a basis of equality of men and women, of human rights and fundamental freedoms in

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5 Commonwealth of Learning (2009), *COL's policy on gender*. Retrieved from http://oasis.col.org/handle/11599/710

6 UNICEF et al., *Glossary*. Retrieved from https://www.unicef.org/gender/training/content/resources/Glossary.pdf

7 Ibid.

8 Gender bias. In *Cambridge Dictionary* (online version, n.d.). Retrieved from https://dictionary.cambridge.org/dictionary/english/gender-bias

9 Gender blindness. In UN Women Training Centre (n.d.), *Gender equality glossary*. Retrieved from: https://training-centre.unwomen.org/mod/glossary/view.php?id=36&mode=letter&hook=G&sortkey=&sortorder=

the political, economic, social, cultural, civil or any other field."[10] Discrimination can stem from both the law and everyday social practices. Countries with discriminatory laws and practices have laws that do not protect women's and girls' well-being, such as not banning forced and early marriage of girls and female genital mutilation (FGM). Discrimination from practice occurs when the law is applied unfairly to women. For example, in some countries a woman who marries someone from another country will lose her citizenship rights, but the same does not apply to men who marry someone from another country.[11]

Gender equality relates to equal rights, responsibilities and opportunities for women and men, girls and boys. It does not mean that women and men will become the same but that individuals' rights, responsibilities and opportunities will not depend on whether they are born female or male. Gender equality implies that the interests, needs and priorities of both women and men are taken into consideration, while also acknowledging the diversity within groups of women and men. Equality between women and men is seen as both a human rights issue and a precondition for, and indicator of, sustainable people-centred development.[12]

Gender gap refers to the differences between women's and men's access to resources, participation levels, power, rights, influence, remuneration and benefits. For example, the term "gender pay gap" is widely applied to refer to the disparity between the average earnings of women and men. More up-to-date and detailed information on global gender gaps can be found in the World Economic Forum's annual reports focusing on these four pillars: economic

participation and opportunity; educational attainment; health and survival; and political empowerment.[13]

Gender gap in education refers to the disparity in education attainment between women/girls and men/boys.

Gender neutrality in learning materials means that gender is not seen as being relevant to learning outcomes. While it is a little better than gender blindness as it does not reinforce existing inequalities, it still does not advocate for change in gender roles and responsibilities.

Gender perspective is "a way of seeing or analyzing which looks at the impact of gender on people's opportunities, social roles and interactions." It is crucial in gender analysis, which in turn is used "to mainstream or integrate a gender perspective into any proposed program, policy or organization."[14]

Gender roles pertain to "social and behavioral norms that, within a specific culture, are widely considered to be socially appropriate for individuals of a specific sex. These often determine the traditional responsibilities and tasks assigned to men, women, boys and girls. Gender-specific roles are often conditioned by household structure, access to resources, specific impacts of the global economy, occurrence of conflict or disaster, and other locally relevant factors such as ecological conditions. Like gender itself, gender roles can evolve over time, in particular through the empowerment of women and transformation of masculinities."[15] See also *Reproductive roles*.

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10 United Nations (1979), Convention on the Elimination of all forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW). Article 1. Retrieved from https://www.ohchr.org/Documents/ProfessionalInterest/cedaw.pdf

11 Gender discrimination. In UN Women Training Centre, *Glossary*.

12 Commonwealth of Learning, *Policy on gender*.

13 The most recent report is *The global gender gap report 2018*. https://www.weforum.org/reports/the-global-gender-gap-report-2018. PDF available for download.

14 Gender perspective. In UN Women Training Centre, *Glossary*.

15 UNICEF et al., *Glossary*.

Gender stereotypes are "simplistic generalizations about the gender attributes, differences and roles of women and men"; for example, that women are gentle and nurturing and should be concerned with looking after their family, and men are aggressive and logical and should be concerned with working hard to earn money to support their family. They tend to push the message that women are inferior to men and "are often used to justify gender discrimination more broadly and can be reflected and reinforced by traditional and modern theories, laws and institutional practices."[16]

Occupational gender segregation refers to a labour market where traditional gender roles strongly influence which jobs men and women work in (e.g. in some regions, women tend to dominate in the service industry, with men dominating the construction and business sectors), with women generally earning significantly less than men.

Qualitative gender-sensitive data seek to measure the quality of women's/girls' and men's/boys' participation in and experience of various aspects of life, including, for example, education, meetings and public services.[17] It shows the ways in which women/girls participated in activities, and the level of their active involvement, rather than simply showing the number or percentage of women/girls who participated compared to men/boys. In general, qualitative gender-sensitive data may require time and persistence as it can be a form of storytelling that can provide important evidence and can be used to validate *quantitative sex-disaggregated data* (see below).

Quantitative sex-disaggregated data break down data in numbers, percentages, or ratio for each sex into smaller categories, such as economic status to present a general picture of the general conditions experienced by women and men, girls and boys in daily life. Additional examples include literacy rates, education levels, business ownership, employment, wage differences, dependents, house and land ownership, loans and credit, debts, etc. "When data is not disaggregated by sex, it is more difficult to identify real and potential inequalities. Sex-disaggregated data is necessary for effective gender analysis."[18]

Reproductive roles: Family and societal expectations of women's/girls' roles focus on pregnancy and child care, as well as looking after the household on a daily basis (domestic chores) without pay or recognition. Women's and girls' reproductive role, especially in low-income households, has a negative impact on their education because it does not leave much time for learning activities.

Sex refers to the natural biological characteristics that human beings are born with, which categorise them as female or male. In contrast to "gender," sex is not influenced by culture or time. Unless medical intervention is involved, the sex of an individual cannot be changed.

Unequal access to resources such as Internet services: In 2015, only 41% of women worldwide had access to the Internet compared to 46% of men.[19] The figures are even lower in Least Developing Countries, where only 8% of women had access versus 11% of men. The implication of the digital gender gap is that fewer women will

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16 Gender stereotypes. In UN Women Training Centre, *Glossary*.

17 Adapted from UNESCO (2003), *Gender sensitive quantitative and qualitative indicators*. Retrieved from http://www.unesco.org/new/fileadmin/MULTIMEDIA/HQ/BSP/GENDER/PDF/3.%20UNESCO%20Gender%20 Lens%20for%20measuring%20performance%20guide%20for%20developing%20gender%20sensitive%20indicators.pdf

18 Sex-disaggregated data. In UN Women Training Centre, *Glossary*.

19 International Telecommunication Union (2015), *Measuring the information society*, p. 22. Retrieved from https://www.itu.int/en/publications/ITU-D/pages/publications.aspx?parent=D-IND-ICTOI-2015

seek out online education, although this trend is changing in households with computers and Internet access.

Women's lower status: The law in many countries grants authority of the household to the husband. For example, 27 countries have laws that state that women must obey their husbands.[20] This means that women in these countries are not free to decide for themselves. Those who wish to pursue an education can only do so if their husbands give them permission.

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20 OECD, 2019. Gender Equality. *A long way before turning promises into progress: discriminatory laws and social norms still hamper gender equality.* Retrieved from https://www.oecd.org/gender/data/a-long-way-before-turning-promises-into-progress-discriminatory-laws-and-social-norms-still-hamper-gender-equality.htm

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World Bank. (2017). Data. Population, female (% of total) 2017. Retrieved from https://data.worldbank.org/indicator/SP.POP.TOTL.FE.ZS

World Economic Forum. (17 September 2015). *This is what the world's education gender gap looks like*. https://www.weforum.org/agenda/2015/09/education-gender-gap-around-the-world